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SERMON.

THE QUESTION

OF

WAR WITH GREAT BRITAIN,

EXAMINED UPON

MORAL AND CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES.

"AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL INQUIRED OF THE LORD, SAYING, SHALL I GO OUT TO BATTLE AGAINST THE CHILDREN OF BENJAMIN, MY BROTHER?" . . . . . JUDGES, XX. 27, 28.

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1808.

SEVERAL friends to whom this diſcourſe has been communicated, have thought that it might be of ſome uſe, in the preſent *awful criſis* of our affairs; more eſpecially to the RELIGIOUS PEOPLE of our country. It is therefore ſubmitted, as it was firſt written, to the candid and ſerious attention of all who *fear* GOD *and love their* COUNTRY. If any apology be requiſite for its appearing anonymous, the words of one of our great and good men* are adopted. "Thoſe who are in the habit of approving or condemning, more from regard to *perſons* than to *things*, wiſh to know the author before they read a book. In the hope that theſe ſheets may be *impartially* conſidered, the writer will not affix his name."

* "*Anſwer to War in Diſguiſe*," *attributed by thoſe who have the beſt means of knowing, to His Excellency* RUFUS KING, *Eſq.*

SERMON.

JUDGES xx. 27, 28.

"*And the children of Iſrael inquired of the Lord, ſaying, Shall I go out to battle againſt the children of Benjamin, my brother ?*"

IT was the character of one of the beſt men of New-England, that "he never would act, without being firſt ſatisfied, that if he did, it would be right."* If that was a good rule for all times, it muſt be indiſpenſable in ſuch a caſe as the ſacred text brings up. A queſtion of war is a ſubject awfully ſolemn! ſurely every good man will chooſe to know what is right *here*, before he acts. And every conſiderate *people*, where the true God is known, will religiouſly aſk counſel of Him, before they engage in this dreadful work! ſee, in this chapter, all the children of Iſrael going up to the houſe of God, to inquire ſolemnly of Him, when ſuch a queſtion was before them. And had they, in the firſt place, done this in due manner, it is highly probable they would have eſcaped thoſe great calamities they were made to feel; and perhaps, might have had no war at all.

The object of this diſcourſe is, to explain that inquiring of the Lord, which becomes a people's duty, when a queſtion of war is before them, and to offer ſome reaſons which show the importance of ſuch inquiry.

Under the firſt head, three things will deſerve conſideration: the object of ſuch inquiry; the way in which it is to be made, and the proper ſpirit and manner of it.

The great object of inquiry is, or ſhould be, whether war, in ſuch caſe, be right in the ſight of God. If it is *not*, no conſiderations ſhould ever perſuade us to it. On the other hand, if it *is*, then it becomes an incumbent duty, and, as ſuch, *muſt* be taken up. For the divine law, in this caſe, does not leave us to *our* diſcretion. The *ſtanding* precept is, Thou ſhalt *not* kill; and the only caſes in which we *may*, are thoſe in which we *muſt*; that is, caſes of clear neceſſity. Accordingly, the queſtion here ſubmitted is, *Shall* I go out to battle? and the anſwer is deciſive; "*Go.*" As elſewhere it is equally peremptory in the negative; "Thus ſaith the Lord, ye ſhall *not* go up, nor fight againſt your brethren, the children of Iſrael."†

But the general queſtion, "Would it be right in the ſight of God?" muſt include more particulars than one. Whether going to war

* See the obituary notice of the venerable Dr. Sewall. † 1 Kings, xii. 24.

would be doing justly *to those we are to war against*, is one point. If it would not, then certainly it would not be right in the sight of God, but a crime of high degree. For instance, it would be flagrantly unjust to make war without provocation. It would be unjust to go to war upon *slight* provocation. Because, by the supposition, the punishment you aim to inflict, is far greater than the crime. And if *great wrong* has been done to us, yet, if some aggression on our part has provoked it, it might still be unjust to go to war for it.

But there is another point of inquiry; viz. Whether going to war would be doing justice *to ourselves* and *to our children?*

If it would not, suppose it were not unjust to the adverse party, it could not be right in the sight of God. For instance, if, in all probability, it would plunge us into much greater evils than those which it aims to repel; or than would have been suffered without war; if, instead of redressing our grievances, it would greatly increase them; in short, if no equivalent were likely to be found for all we should suffer, nor any valuable purpose answered; in such case, engaging in war would be more than impolitick; it would be *immoral*. It would be a flagrant violation of a sacred trust; viz. *the guardianship* of our children and posterity committed to us by Heaven, and for which we are solemnly responsible; nay, it would be a kind of *suicide;* and if the law against murder forbids individuals to destroy themselves, it certainly regards as a high crime for a nation to sacrifice thousands of its people, without necessity clear as the day. Every thing, therefore, of this nature, as well as every thing belonging to the question of justice to our neighbour, must be a subject of solemn inquiry.

We come to consider in what way this inquiry must be made. No *immediate* answers from heaven are now to be expected by audible voice, by prophetick dreams, visions, or the like; no responses by Urim and Thummim; no priests, nor prophets, by whose simple declarations our duty is to be determined. No; but we have a DIVINE RULE, which marks for us a clear line of conduct in all great concerns, and every part of it approves itself to conscience. For instance, we have the golden rule our divine Master gave us, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so them."* According to this, we must maintain no points against others, which we could not think it would be right for others to maintain against us; and be sure to consider nothing as cause of war, which we must not confess would be such, if done by ourselves.

Again we have a command, which says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness:" that is, as an excellent good man and wise man used to comment upon it, pursue peace, though it seem to flee from you; and let nothing stop your pursuit, but what is *contrary* to holiness. If the first efforts prove ineffectual, follow on with redoubled exertions, while any hope remains.

Again, we are commanded, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."† For this, it seems, we must en-

* Matt. vii, 12. † Rom. xii. 18.

terprise with all our faculties and with all our might; and if the object can be honestly and honourably obtained, then it *must* be.

Coincident with this, is another command: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."* We are overcome when our passions get the dominion, so that fighting pleases us better than honourable peace: And certainly, when we are so passionate that we will fight unnecessarily, under every disadvantage, and without hope. This should never be, if the greatest evil has been done to us; and much less, if none but what we ourselves have provoked. Instead of this, full trial should be made, in every case, of that magnanimity, that moderation and liberality, which rarely fail to disarm a generous adversary, as much as conquering him by the sword. If upon all trial, it should not have that effect, then it may be hoped, that gracious Heaven will show what must be done in another way.

In fine; "Blessed are the peace makers," says our Divine Lord, "for they shall be called the children of God." And who can those peace makers be, but such as follow the God of peace; and his Son, the great Mediator between heaven and earth; and can therefore condescend, if they are the *only* party injured, to *seek* reconciliation, and go very great lengths for it, before they will give it over.

Such is the genius of the dispensation we are under, and to which our own best hopes are all to be ascribed. And if sentiments like these ought to prevail in our individual concerns, who would not suppose that *nations* bearing the christian name, should likewise have respect to them in their national transactions; and are without excuse if they will rush to war as hastily, and as passionately, upon slight provocation, as uninformed barbarians have been wont to do; or upon *great* provocation without first making trial of all those honourable condescension which the gospel precepts enjoin, and its great examples recommend?†

The way therefore to inquire the mind of God, when a question of war is before us, is to study the BIBLE; and especially the genius of the GOSPEL of PEACE. *Then*, apply its sacred maxims and sentiments to our own case, viewed in all its circumstances and connexions. Let this be done with solemnity, as in the presence of that Being, to whom nations, and each individual must give account. This is the way to know whether going to war be our indispensable duty. I say, *indispensable* duty, for the reason given above, that the only case in which war is *permitted*, is, where necessity is laid upon us, and we *must* go to war. I say indispensable duty, for another reason. This is one of those cases, where in order to act with a clear conscience, we must be freed from all reasonable doubt. If in a capital trial, where any doubts remain, no verdict shall be given that shall take away life;

* Rom. xii. 21.

† "O shame to man!————
————Men only disagree,
Of creatures rational, though under hope
Of heav'nly grace, and God proclaiming peace;
Yet live in hatred, levy cruel wars,
Wasting the earth." MILTON.

certainly there should be no decision at a venture, or without *clear* necessity, for destroying the lives of thousands.

But, inquiring of the Lord supposes, offering up *prayers* to Him, as well as studying his word. If, "in every thing," prayer be a bounden duty,* it certainly is in so great a concern as this. Plain as the rules are, we know, or should know, how liable we are to err, through frailty, from prepossession, or the want of a right spirit. God in his great goodness has therefore pointed out this way of addressing ourselves to Him, that we may understand our duty as it lies before us, and be preserved from whatever would mislead us, either as to the rule itself, or its application to the present case. We must *watch*, as well as pray, if we would inquire in the appointed order.† That is, be always on our guard against the various causes, and *occasions* of deception.

And thus we come to consider, the proper spirit and manner of this inquiry. Here I shall chiefly take up such hints as Israel's error in the first instance, and dear bought experience in the course of things, clearly point out to us.

1. We should ask counsel in an unbiassed and unreserved manner. We should come to it, with a mind as open as possible to conviction, and ready to submit ourselves to Heaven's direction, *in all points*. It was the error of Israel, that, before they came to ask counsel of the Lord, they had made up their minds. Very unhappily, the first notice of the *affair* which had happened, was given in a manner, just fitted to inflame their passions to the utmost: and it had the effect. In that inflamed state of mind, *without* a particular and solemn inquiry, either into the state of facts, or into the mind of God, they determined at once what to do. They would not even go to their tents, nor turn to their houses; but they would go off direct, and arrange themselves for war. In that threatening attitude they made their demands; as though it were not even intended that their brethren should comply.*. And when they came afterward to the house of the Lord to ask counsel, it is remarkable that they did not submit the *main question*, whether they *should* go up to battle; *that* they had determined *themselves*. The only question they left to their Maker, was, *who* shall go up *first*? To come to inquire of the Lord with a mind so predetermined, was a great impropriety. It was more; it was a great sin. And they were punished for it, until they learned to come in a better manner. After a dreadful overthrow, then they submitted the whole subject.

2. When we come with a question of war, it should be with great tenderness of mind, both in deference to the adverse party, and to the lives and interests of our own people.

Here likewise, Israel, hurried on by their passions, appear to have been strangely deficient. They seem not to have calculated upon any distress to be felt on their own part; and as to their brethren, against whom they were arming, they appear quite regardless how much *they* might suffer. But after a mortifying defeat; after losing twenty two

*See Phil. iv. 6. † Matt. xxvi. 41. ‖ See v. 9 to 13.

thouſand men in the very firſt battle, in a diſpute, which a little moderation, perhaps, might have ſettled without any bloodſhed, they began to weep for themſelves and their country; to think what a dreadful calamity war was; and whether they had not ruſhed too precipitately into ſuch an unnatural conteſt as this, with a people of their own blood, their own language and manners, and their own religion. And *now* it is inſtructive to ſee how their ſtile is altered. At firſt it was, "*Which* of us ſhall go up *firſt* to battle againſt the *children of Benjamin*?"* as though they were no more related to *them* than any other people. But now it is, "Shall I go again to battle againſt the children of Benjamin, *my brother*?"†

If the war were ever ſo neceſſary, it was but proper they ſhould feel in that manner. How diſtreſſing then ſhould be the thought, to plunge into it without neceſſity?

3. A trembling ſenſe of dependence on the favour of Heaven, ſhould never forſake us; and certainly not when a queſtion of war is before us. Whether in ſuch an undertaking the Lord of Hoſts would be with us, or whether he would only frown upon it, are intereſting queſtions. And it is madneſs to put them out of ſight; whether we are plainly feeble and unprepared, or whether our proſpects, in a human view, are highly flattering. It was Iſrael's great error to be ſo confident of victory, becauſe they could bring ſuch an army into the field. There was probably ſo much the leſs of looking up for Divine aid, and ſo much the leſs of trembling for thoſe ſins which expoſed them to humiliating diſappointment. And ſee how diſtreſſingly their ſelf-confidence was puniſhed. In the two firſt actions, though in compariſon with their enemy they were nearly in the proportion of fifteen to one, their ſuperior numbers did little more than to ſwell the number of their ſlain; and before they *began* to have any ſucceſs, they had loſt forty thouſand men. So dangerous is it, as well as improper, to truſt in an arm of fleſh, and forget our dependence on the Sovereign Power!

4. Inquiring of the Lord on the ſubject of war, ſhould be with ſincere mourning for thoſe ſins, by which the bleſſings of peace have been forfeited, and throwing ourſelves upon mercy in the appointed way. When Iſrael came firſt to inquire about war, nothing appeared of mourning for their ſins, or imploring mercy, on that account. And war ſeems to be ſent upon them for a puniſhment of ſuch impenitence, and for their great declenſions; eſpecially the idolatry which was now tolerated in the land, though according to their law, it ſhould have have been a firſt object of reform. At their ſecond inquiry, there ſeems to be a mourning of ſome ſort; but without thoſe accompaniments, which were required in ſuch caſe. Therefore they ſtill met with ſore rebuke. But the third time there was deep mourning, and faſting, and the offering of burnt ſacrifices, and peace-offerings; and *ſo* they inquired of the Lord, through the mediation of the High Prieſt. And now the God of Iſrael had reſpect to his

* v. 18. † v. 23.

own appointments, and an anſwer of peace was given to them. Shall *we* be found waiting on the Lord in like manner, with deep humiliation; with affectionate ſupplication for pardon and peace, and a due reference to the *Great* High Prieſt and his atoning ſacrifice?

We now come to the ſecond general head; the importance of ſuch inquiring of the Lord in every ſuch caſe.

It is a plain duty, "In all thy ways acknowledge him."* Certainly then, in all ſuch *great* concerns. It is an honour due to the Sovereign of the world. If the eyes of ſervants ſhould look to the hand of their maſter, and the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her miſtreſs,† much more ſhould every eye to *His* directing hand, to whom above all, it is our buſineſs to approve ourſelves.

In *this* caſe nothing *can* be right which the Maſter does not approve. The great queſtion, therefore, ought to be "What is right *in the ſight of God*?" This queſtion all good men will chooſe to bring to *Him*. And a proper *teſt of integrity*, or of aiming to do right in all things, is a deſire to know the mind of God, that we may do it; a continual aſking counſel of him, and an unreſerved ſubmitting of all our conduct to His direction: that is, to the direction of his word and ſpirit.

To inquire of the Lord is as plainly a great privilege, as a great duty. How forcible are thoſe words of the Prophet, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himſelf. It is not in man that walketh to direct his ſteps."* In this view he prays to be corrected, that is, to be ſet right. And who does not want this mercy? We ſhould be miſerable, if we might not aſk it. How wretched, if in *great* concerns, we had no ſuch liberty! On the other ſide, the encouragement to ſeek heavenly direction is ineſtimable. "If any of you lack wiſdom, let him aſk of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it ſhall be given him."† How ample, and how gracious is this! And if it reaches *all men*, it extends to nations. Pious rulers and heads of nations had, indeed, in all preceding ages, believed in ſimilar promiſes, and found it not in vain to call their people together, to aſk heavenly direction, upon great occaſions. Witneſs Moſes, Joſhua, Samuel, David, Aſa, Jehoſhaphat, Hezekiah, Joſiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others. The inference is obvious, that *we* are the more inexcuſable, if we do not, both individually and collectively, avail ourſelves of this high privilege. And we are the more *expoſed*, if it be neglected. Who indeed can hope to proſper, that do not aſk divine direction, and give themſelves up to it?

It ſhould be obſerved, that drawing near to God, and religiouſly referring ourſelves to his direction, are among the beſt means to make us *feel* what *is* right, and free us from the influence of every blinding paſſion. O if we could feel continually the impreſſions of his divine purity, his impartial eye, his holy and good word, how would it purify our ſentiments. And how much better ſhould we judge, than by conſulting our own feelings, and the ſpirit of the world! The beſt

* Prov. iii. 4. † Pſ. cxxiii. * Jer. x. 23. † Jam i. 5.

men, from age to age, have found the benefit of often retiring to *this* ſanctuary, and thouſands beſide have found a ſtrong check upon what was wrong in their ſpirits or inclinations.

On the whole, the different ſucceſs Iſrael met with, *before* their inquiring of the Lord in due manner, and *after* it, is inſtead of a thouſand arguments to confirm its importance. On the one ſide, we ſee a bleſſing; on the other ſide, diſhonour and diſappointment. In every caſe where this great duty is neglected, both princes and people will follow their own headlong paſſions; they will plunge into war where there is no neceſſity; and they will bend and ſubmit, where they ought to have ſtood firm. Or, if they ſometimes happen to do right, it will not be in obedience to the Divine pleaſure, but to their own; and who, in that caſe, is to bleſs and reward them? in ſhort, it would be improper to expect to ſee wiſdom, or conſiſtency, true honour or a bleſſing, where they are not even aſked for.

Our ſubject, on a review, leads us to inquire ſeriouſly, What have been *our* habits, with reſpect to aſking counſel of God in all great concernments: and, in particular, whether we have been duly awake to this great duty, ſince the queſtion of war has been moved in theſe United States. To ſuppoſe that *any* perſons have been ſufficiently awake to this duty, and to the whole way and manner of it, is to ſuppoſe a great deal. Yet numbers, we ought to believe, have felt this as a great concern, acted upon it as ſuch, and carried it with them among their firſt wiſhes, that the Sovereign of the world, notwithſtanding our ill-deſervings, would vouchſafe to manifeſt his pleaſure, both to the government and the people of this nation; and that his pleaſure thus manifeſted, might be religiouſly reſpected. Others, I am afraid, in various parts of the land, have been too much abſorbed in contemplations merely political, and too indifferent to the main queſtion, What is the will of God upon this awful occaſion, and what meaſures will beſt accord with his holy directions? How many have made up their minds, without religiouſly and diſpaſſionately conſulting the *Holy Oracle*, it is not my province to determine. One thing is certain, that the alarm which went forth in the firſt inſtance, was too much adapted, like that in Iſrael's caſe, to awake our paſſions, and induce a committing of ourſelves, before we were ſufficiently informed.

Another thing is certain, that this nation, called by the name of chriſtian, has not yet been led, according to former uſage on great occaſions, to petition the Supreme Power, that an honourable tranquillity may be continued to theſe ſtates, or to ſubmit to Him the queſtion, Whether we *muſt* go out to battle againſt our brother? And I believe it may be ſaid, without enthuſiaſm, that we have been left ſo much the more to our own wiſdom, and our own counſels. I am afraid, indeed, that the name of *brother*, has been very much dropped, as in the caſe of Iſrael againſt Benjamin, and all thoſe tender arguments thrown out of ſight, which would make it ſeem dreadful to ſtain our hands with Engliſh blood. If this be the caſe any where, or in any meaſure, let me pray my countrymen to correct themſelves in this, before they go a ſtep further, and certainly before they ultimately decide

the great queſtion before them, and candidly to conſider, whether ſuch a bias muſt not have proceeded from ſomething wrong at bottom, and ſomething which Heaven may think proper to cure by ſore calamity, as in that caſe, unleſs it be ſeaſonably put away.

While paſſion reigns, we are not prepared even to conſult the oracle in due manner, or to act our parts rightly in the courſe of things, if it ſhould appear that we ought to take up arms. How unprepared then, with ſuch paſſions, to take up our duty, if the voice of Heaven ſhould command us to go and make peace ?

May the grace of Heaven prepare us to come with unbiaſſed minds, and ſubmit the whole queſtion of war ; whether it would be right in the ſight of God ; whether it would agree with the golden rule of Chriſt, and with all the ſacred maxims and precepts of the goſpel ; whether, in ſhort, in the view of Infinite Rectitude, it would agree both with juſtice to our neighbour, and juſtice to ourſelves and our children ; whether it be ſo neceſſary that we cannot keep a good conſcience without it.

But in order to underſtand our duty, it is not only neceſſary to ſtudy the ſacred oracles with great care, and prayerful application ; but to conſider with as much accuracy as poſſible, the ſtate of facts, and impartially compare them with the ſacred rule, that we may ſee how it applies.

Suppoſe then, we ſhould *now* ſpend a few moments, in reviewing and pondering in its principal circumſtances, the caſe which we have to bring and ſubmit, to the arbiter of nations.*

It is known to all, that the immediate occaſion of the alarm throughout theſe ſtates, was an attack on the 22d of June laſt, by a Britiſh frigate on a publick armed ſhip of the United States, (by which ſeveral of our people were killed, and a number more wounded,) and a taking away by force from *our* ſhip, ſeveral of the men on board. All this was proclaimed and publiſhed throughout the Union ; and produced (as every one would ſuppoſe) a ſtrong ſenſation ; ſtronger indeed, than would have been felt, had the whole caſe been ſtated. You were told of the attack, but not of the irritations which preceded, or the queſtion that brought it on. Indeed it was announced as an "enormity committed without provocation." And I am very ſorry that it was ſo announced !

You are told of the aſſailants taking away the men ; but not that they took them as of right under their command ; not that they took them as ſo many deſerters from the Britiſh ſervice, and known on all hands, to be ſuch ; not that they took them in *this* way, becauſe their applications in a civil way, though often repeated, had been as often refuſed.

It was announced as a finiſhing circumſtance to mark the character of this action, that "it had been previouſly aſcertained, that the men demanded were native Americans ;" when the fact

* It has not been thought neceſſary to load this publication with documents. The facts here ſtated have been again and again before the publick, and ſtand uncontradicted.

is, that nothing was aſcertained by regular inquiry, till ſometime after; when the fact is, that the men *demanded*, and for the recovery of whom the attack was made, were all native Britons; and of all who were *taken off*, only a *part* were native Americans; and you ſhould have been appriſed that *they* were men who had voluntarily enliſted into the Britiſh ſervice, and had deſerted; whom, therefore, by our laws, we had no right to retain, when demanded by their officers. Theſe were the facts, relative to the proclaimed attack. And whatever would have been its character, if made without provocation, all muſt acknowledge that the circumſtances which brought it on, went far to reduce its *enormity*, if not wholly to change its complexion. The principle lately ſet up in America, of covering all Britiſh ſubjects, who ſhould come under our flag, not excepting mutineers and deſerters, together with the ſubſequent practice, of inveigling and enliſting Britiſh ſeamen, had produced a ſerious effect. It threatened the annihilation of the Britiſh maritime power. It threatened in particular to defeat the intention for which the Britiſh ſquadron now in our ſeas, was ſent out; and to give their enemy an eſcape. The Britiſh were loſing their men every day, and the anſwer of our officers, and of adminiſtration itſelf to reſpectful applications for thoſe men, left no hope of redreſs. *Their* officers, quite recently have given up to ours, Britiſh men who had deſerted *our* ſervice; and we, who now denied their reſpectful applications, had lately given up deſerters from the French, though demanded in a coarſe way. All this the officers of Britain knew and felt before they made their laſt demand of their men on board our ſhip; and meeting with an ultimate refuſal, they did, as our Prebles or Decaturs would have done; took by force ſuch deſerters as they found there.

Taking all theſe facts and circumſtances into view, we ſhould have found it difficult to conſider this *attack* as ſufficient cauſe of war, if the government of Britain had authoriſed it. In ſuch a ſtate of things, as the venerable Biſhop of Aſaph in 1774, ſaid upon another occaſion, "We ought to have expected the ſtrongeſt marks of reſentment, and to have been prepared to forgive them."

But as the caſe was, this attack was the act of individuals, and not of the government; therefore, the many invectives on this occaſion, againſt the Britiſh nation, and againſt their government, ſhould have been ſpared. Theſe certainly had no tendency to promote juſtice, or to prevent a rupture. And whether our putting ourſelves, like Iſrael, in ſuch a hoſtile attitude, and proclaiming hoſtility againſt the whole Britiſh navy, before making our demands of reparation, was clearly neceſſary, or whether any principle of true honour required it, deſerves a ſerious thought. What would have been loſt, in point of dignity or wiſdom, had we, without aſſuming ſuch an air of defiance, choſen to rely upon it, that the government of Britain, on a ſimple repreſentation of the caſe, would do all that was proper? If we had choſen, I ſay, to rely upon it, till the contrary ſhould appear?

It is certainly a ſtrong proof of the magnanimity of that government, and its ſincere diſpoſition to maintain peace, that it has, under

circumſtances ſo forbidding, diſapproved the attack on the Cheſapeake ; recalled the officer who ordered it ; appointed a ſpecial miniſter of peace to come over and ſettle this ſad affair, on terms of amity, and, by publick proclamation, to all intents given it in orders, that no ſuch act ſhall be done hereafter, be the provocation what it may, without a repreſentation firſt made to the government.

Such being the ſtate of things, the Cheſapeake diſpute ſeems now in a train to be finiſhed, IF WE ARE PACIFICK ON OUR PART. And the queſtion of war now appears reduced to one ſingle point; ſhall we make war with our brethren, becauſe, by the Proclamation abovementioned, they claim their own men, becauſe they demand their aſſiſtance when in extreme want of it, and forbid their withdrawing themſelves without permiſſion ? Is this that caſe of clear neceſſity, in which we, as in duty bound, muſt fly to arms ? What, to interfere between a government, and its ſubjects, and preſcribe the rules by which both the one and the other ſhall be governed ! To encourage deſertion, at this critical moment, which requires every man in that ſervice to be at his poſt ! To fill our country with runaways, and our ſhips with foreigners, inſtead of our own people ! Excellent privilege !

Suppoſe then we go to war for it, have we a probable hope, that we ſhall obtain and eſtabliſh it ? No. After the deſtruction of all our commerce, after a moſt coſtly ſacrifice of treaſure and of blood ; the moſt probable reſult is, that we ſhall ſue for peace, and yield the very point for which we contend. But ſuppoſe, for a moment, that we obtain it ; what is it worth ? Nothing. No, it is a great deal worſe. We have filled our country and depraved our government with the refuſe of Europe. We have diſcouraged and depreſſed our own native citizens ; and thrown by degrees, the defence of all that is dear to us, into their hands that do not naturally feel for it ; and who, in caſe of war againſt their native connexions, would deſert again ? And are theſe the precious advantages we are going to buy at ſuch a price ?

But WOULD SUCH A CONTEST BE RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF HEAVEN ? This is the great queſtion, would it agree with the golden rule, of doing *to others*, as we could ſoberly wiſh that they ſhould do to us ? We do not intend that the flag of any nation ſhall cover deſerters from *us*. We are in the habit of reclaiming them from whoever have given them ſhelter ; our brave officers are honoured for doing this, and doing it *with ſpirit*, when they cannot effect it otherwiſe. And the immortal Nelſon had too great a ſoul, to conſider this as a crime. Great Britain has no idea of protecting deſerters from *us*, but gives them up ; and we give deſerters up, to all nations, except Britain. If we mean to refuſe this, why not declare war againſt the other nations of Europe, whoſe laws, in this point, are ſubſtantially the ſame with hers ? And why ſhall Great Britain be the only nation we conteſt this point with ? *Is this maintaining our neutrality*, in the honeſt and honourable manner in which we ſhould maintain it ? Nay, in what way could we ſo effectually take ſides with one of

the belligerents againſt the other, as by contending for ſuch a principle, at this awful criſis?

Can it poſſibly be juſt *to ourſelves* and to our children, to plunge into ſuch calamity for ſo poor an object, ſuppoſe it were a lawful one? Can it poſſibly be excuſable to encounter ſuch calamity in an unrighteous cauſe? A greater injury cannot be done to a nation, than that of involving it in an unjuſt war, ſuppoſe it were ſucceſsful. It demoralizes a people to an amazing degree: and *that* is enſlaving them in the worſt ſenſe of the word; *unleſs they can have the virtue to awake and aſſert their ſacred rights.* A queſtion of war is far different from a mere political queſtion. It is *a caſe of conſcience*, where every man who is to act, ſhould know what he is going about. It is againſt our principles to compel men into *religion*, in any form which their conſciences cannot approve: and ſhall we compel them into horrid guilt? Shall we compel them to ſhed blood, where they in their conſciences believe, that their Maſter in Heaven forbids it? How ſhall we ever, in ſuch a cauſe, lift up our eyes for Heaven's protection? And what will become of a cauſe which we cannot aſk God to proſper?

War has been called an *appeal to Heaven.* And when we can, with full confidence, make the appeal, like David, and aſk to be proſpered according to our righteouſneſs, and the cleanneſs of our hands,* what ſtrength and animation it gives us!

When the illuſtrious Waſhington, at an early ſtage of our revolutionary conteſt, committed the cauſe in that ſolemn manner. "May that God whom you have invoked, judge between us and you,"† how our hearts glowed that we had ſuch a cauſe to commit! And do we believe that that beſt of men, if he were now preſent, would ſpeak with the ſame confidence in a cauſe of *ſheltering runaways*? Or do we believe that his virtuous ſoul would ſhrink back from it?

I have hinted the importance of coming *with clean hands* into the court of Heaven, if we mean to make our appeal there. And are we ſure that we are not the aggreſſors in this controverſy? Are we ſure that only a common courteſy and equity on our part, would not have prevented it all? If we are not ſure, how muſt that thought embitter every moment of the conteſt, even if we were to go on triumphantly! What muſt it then, if every thing ſhould go againſt us? And *ſince* this act of individuals was committed, have we certainly done all that was proper, to prevent a national rupture? Are we ſure that Great Britain has not far *outdone* us in pacifick diſpoſitions? How then have we complied with the rule we are under, "If it be poſſible, as much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men?" If without full confidence in all theſe points, we cannot arm ourſelves againſt *any* nation, but with conſcious guilt, ſhall we in theſe circumſtances go to war with our own kindred, with a people of our own religion? Infidelity, I know, may deſpiſe this argument, but men of chriſtian ſentiments will feel how eminently unnatural it is, that two chriſtian nations, trained up in goſpel ſentiments, ſet up for lights to the world, apparent-

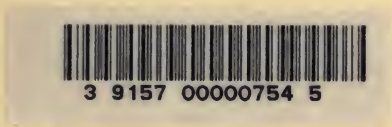
* Pſalm xviii. 24. † See his letter to Gen. Gage, in July, 1775.

ly deſtined by Providence to ſpread this divine religion through the earth, and who, at this moment, are doing more for that purpoſe than all people in the world beſide, *ſhould*, without the moſt imperious and irreſiſtible neceſſity, be ſeen contending in hoſtile array, "*which ſhould do the other moſt harm;*" and thus become a ſtumbling block, inſtead of a proper example, to pagans and barbarians!

If ſtill there are thoſe who wiſh to inflame us againſt thoſe brethren, by the unpleaſant things of former years; let our own better ſentiments, even in times of higheſt irritation and greateſt danger, furniſh the anſwer. Our declaration of Independence in 1776, was in this ſtile: "Henceforth we ſhall regard them (i. e. the people of Great Britain,) as we do other nations, enemies in war, in peace friends." How inconſiſtent is it, therefore, now to call up thoſe ſufferings from Britain, which ſhould have been long ago buried in oblivion! Let our treaty of peace and amity with which we cloſed the war, furniſh an anſwer; unleſs we were hypocrites. Let that Independence anſwer, which, by the favour of Heaven, we obtained: and which our brethren of Britain were, at leaſt, as cordial in eſtabliſhing, as our own allies were. In fine, let the memorable propoſition brought forward in Maſſachuſetts, at an early period after the eſtabliſhment of *our* peace, recal us from every ſentiment unworthy of the ſame people. The propoſition was to this effect, that an addreſs might go from our federal government to the courts of Europe, praying that ſome mode might be conſulted for the ſettlement of national controverſies, ſo that war, in every caſe, might be prevented. Whatever may be thought of the practicability of ſuch a propoſition, it will at leaſt, be a pleaſing monument of the ſpirit of thoſe times, when a rare conſtellation of wiſe and virtuous patriots, enlightened and adorned the councils of this republick.

And be it remembered, that if after this, we ſhall ever be conſenting in a war, not clearly juſt, and clearly indiſpenſable, the ſpirit of 1775, the ſpirit of 1783, the ſpirit of the beſt times, of this and every other nation, will riſe in judgment againſt us.

FINIS.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